

A Sermon on Witchcraft 1697
By Rev. James Hutchison.

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THIS transcript is made from a contemporary Manuscript containing careful and full copies of the 'Informations,' and some other papers, regarding the trial of the Renfrewshire witches, whose burning in 1697 is one of the saddest episodes in the history of Paisley. Dr. Metcalfe in his *History of the County of Renfrew* has recently summarised the story, which has been prolific in a literature of its own.

The sermon, by Mr. Hutchison, then, I think, minister of Kilallan, occupies eight pages of the MS. It deserves attention not only as an exposition of the witchcraft doctrine of the period, and a demonstration of unshaken faith in it, but also as a rather fierce reflection of contemporary spirit in its painfully direct pressure on the judges to convict and sentence to death—for that is the English of the 'word' offered in the half-dozen closing paragraphs 'to the honourable Judges here appointed for cognosing this affair.' The final observation, 'I go no further,' is assuredly open to the criticism that he went quite far enough, indeed much too far.

Some other opportunity may be taken for giving further particulars of the MS. and discussing its important bearing on certain printed texts of some of the papers. At present it may be enough to say that it was recently acquired in London by me on behalf of Mr. F. T. Barrett, City Librarian, Glasgow, for the Corporation's collection of West of Scotland manuscripts, gradually becoming an appreciable feature of the Mitchell Library. Internal evidence makes probable the inference that the MS., containing 33 leaves of foolscap, measuring $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches by $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and stitched in a sheepskin cover, belonged to John Shaw of Baggarran, father of Christine Shaw, famous doubly in a bad and good sense as (1) the 'bewitched' girl who was the cause of the burning of the seven unfortunates (four 'witches' and three 'warlocks') who perished, and as (2) the woman destined in later life to become a celebrity in the industrial annals of Scotland

through her starting Paisley's staple trade of thread-spinning. At anyrate an excerpt from a work on Meditation in an early 18th century hand bears the signature 'Jo. Shaw,' and a side docquet, of probably 19th century date, on the outside page shews that the MS. had once been the property of 'Mr. Glen late of Barragron.' On the same page there is an 18th century account of moneys 'rec'd be Wm. Shaw.' That the book was originally the property of the Shaw family seems open to little doubt.

GEO. NEILSON.

Sermon

Preached by Mr James Hutchisone Before the Commissioners of Justiciary appointed for triall of several persons Suspected Guilty of Witchcraft: Att Pasley the 13 April 1697.

Exodus 22 chapter 18 verse: Thou shalt no^t suffer a witch to Live.

WE have in this verse a precept of the Law of God In Reference to a certain sort of malefactors to be found within the visible Church, even amongst the Israelites. These malefactors are here called witches. The person to whom this direction & command is givine is not exprest or specified: But may be easily understood by the nature of the precept itself. It is a precept of the Judicial Law Givine to the Judges of the people of Israell that was a national church as having the power of the sword committed to them and it not being committed to others we need not insist upon this To whom It is directed.

Ye have in the words first a supposition that there are such malefactors or evil-doers within the visible church as witches. 2^{ly} a precept givine to those to whom the power of the sword is committed that they should not suffer them to Live or that they should not make them to Live. The words are very well translated for any thing we can discern from the original.

By a Witch is understood a person that hath Immediat converse with the devil, That one way or other is under a compact with him acted and influenced by him in reference to the producing such effects as cannot be produced by others without this compact. This in General for the Literal explaining of the words that they should not be suffered to Live is that they should be put to death as in the paralell scripture Levit. 20, 57. The word here is in the feminine gener a She-witch yet Levit. 20 27 the Spirit of God doth expressly mention either man or woman: The man or woman that hath a familiar spirit or a vizard, shall surely be put to death, they shall stone them with stones.

I will not insist any further upon the explication of the words, there are two doctrines that offer themselves to us from the words. One is That among the many sorts of malefactors and evil-doers within the visible church, this is one, that there are some whom the Spirit of God calleth

witches. A 2^d is That he to whom the powere of the sword doth belong, should not suffer such to Live they should put them to death. ffor the first of these and the second both they are proven by the 20 Levit. 27 As to the first doctrine that there are such malefactors as witches and that even in the visible church will appear from Deuteron. 18 10 & 11 v. where they get diverse names.

In handling of this doctrine I shall clear these heads. first what are the ordinary names that the Spirit of God gives to these malefactors 2^{ly} what doth formally constitute a witch or warlock that is a he-witch in our Scots language 3^{ly} what is the nature of the compact that is between Satan and witches 4^{ly} whence It is that any of the visible church are carried aside to this horrid crime & abomination 5^{ly} I shall come to some inferences from this doctrine.

ffor the first of these, The names and titles the Spirit of God gives them in Scripture We find that they are said to have a familiar spirit This in the hebrew Deut. 18, 11 Getts the name of Ob, translated by the Greek and Latine interpreters 'pythones' that have a spirit of Divination, and the reason is because they make use of an evil spirit in their actings, and have a secret and special converse with evil spirits Acts 16 and 16 One is mentioned there that had a spirit of Divination that brought her master great gain and it is the same that is rendered 'python' both in Greek and Latine 2^{ly} Sometime they are called vizards Leviticus 20 26 & 27 and this is of the same import with the former Because they reveal things secret or to come that by mens ordinary wit cannot be reacht. Sometimes again they are called witches as in this text and Deut. 18 10 The word in the hebrew signifies 'praestigiis uti' that is to make use of Jugling Because they Dull and Blunt the sight 4^{ly} they are denominat by 'Inchanters' Deut. 18 10 and the word in the hebrew comes from a word that signifies 'associate' Because Satans way is to Join things together and therefor the Dutch translators Translate it 'Joining' from Joining things together that such and such effects may be produced. Sometimes again they get the name of 'Necromancers' This is from their making use of the dead for their divinatione or their making use of Satan that represents dead persons to them which was the case of the witch at Endor that raisd up the Likeness of Samuel to Saul. These are the names that the scripture gives them we call witches.

ffor the 2^d thing proposed what constitutes one a Witch or Warlock first we would distinguish two or three things before we give a particular description of this And first we would distinguish between a witch, and a person that makes use of a witch in a strait or difficulty and thus we see Saul calld for one that had a familiar spirit that he might know what to do in his strait i Sam. 28 and yet we do not think that Saul was a warlock tho It was a great crime and such a crime that God himself does Levit 20 6 v. expressly threaten, that those that makes use of vizards, he will sett his face against them and cutt them off from among his people. Again we would distinguish between an act of Devilrie Ignorantly and surprizingly committed without any foregoing compact, and an act of Devilrie that proceeds from a compact with the Devil: It may be suppon'd for

clearing this That in a company of witches when a person falls among them accidentally and is surprizd and they say 'up and away' or 'mount & flee' and he sayes that too and he flies with the rest to this or that countrey and preys upon such a person or his goods and returns again, this person is not a witch, he speaks the word the rest speaks Inadvertently & is carried away with the rest, But it is another thing for, a person to be carried away differently upon Satans influence deliberately and knowingly. Again there are some sins so gross in their own nature that every single act of them deserves death by the Law of God such as incest, sodomy, Bestiality &c. A single act of these is so gross that it deserves death by this Law, And so I take ane act of Witchcraft formally so called to be such a gross sin that every single act y^rof deserves death by the Law of God.

Now in the next place to come to the Question proposed what constitutes formally a person to be a witch? I speak now either of man or woman It being Relative to both. I have not had any help in this matter. I give yow my thoughts what I find may be said of it from the Scripture and it is this that in the constituting of persons formally a witch, It requires that there be a reall compact between Satan & that person either personally drawn up & made, or Mediatly by parents immediat or mediat having power of the person; adding y^runto his mark. The Ground of my assertion is this, there is no Less requisite to the constituting a person a visible professor of christ, then a personal compact and the external signe of Baptism super-added, or a reall compact made mediatly by mens intervention giving them to god having his seall added whereby they are to be accompted visible professors of Christ. No Less doth Satan require of them that will follow in his way then either personal covenanting with him, and receiving his mark upon y^r flesh, or that the parent give their children to him and they receive his mark, and where this is, I doubt not such a person is really a witch or warlock, and even suppose it be a child it will be found afterwards (if the Lords powerfully converting of the soul to himself prevent it not) That such persons will be as really in covenant with Satan, as the children of professing parents receiving baptism will be found to be in covenant with god. We cannot get this deny'd that childeren that have not given themselves personally over to Jesus christ yet being traird up in the church & waiting upon the ordinances & baptized they are acknowledged visible professors of the true God. So I say where parents mediat or Immediat father or Grandfather gives their childeren to Satan & trains them up in the art of Witchcraft & useing y^r meetings Such are to be Look'd upon as really in compact with Satan as the childeren of professing parents are said to be in covenant with God tho they themselves have not givine themselves expressly over to god or Christ.

In the next place as to the nature of the compact that is between Satan & those that follow him, It most be no Less then this that they shall worship him as their God, that they shall follow him as their guide, that they shall be acted and influenced by him in his sinfull ways & actings & even in such wherein they could not produce any effect if Satan did not concurr with them. The ground of this assertion I take to be

this We find in scripture that there are many persons by nature that are Gross sinners, yet not formally witches, concerning them the spirit of God sayes that Satan is their God, that the God of this world hath blinded their minds; This sayes that even they that are not witches, by nature, Satan is y^r prince, the scripture saith they follow the prince of the power of the air this is said of ordinary common natural folks & much more of Gross transgressors that are not witches. Now this that makes the difference between these that are in nature, & these that are witches is this what the scripture sayes of the one Interpretatively or by construction that they do such things Ignorantly and yet really and practically. These that are witches do them not only by interpretation but formally directly and upon knowledge and intentionally. And for my part I know not how to put a difference between those that are witches, and those that are not witches but naturall gross transgressors, if this be not it That the one does these things by vertew of a compact and the oy^r Doth them only interpretatively. They are constructed to be worshipers of Satan selling themselves to do wickedly and to follow the prince of the power of the air; But when those things are done by virtue of a compact that makes the difference: But so it is that this is the nature of the compact, that they consent to Satans proposalls, That he should be worshiped by them; some sell themselves to do wickedly practically or interpretatively: But thir sell themselves intentionally and expressly to Satan. Hence it is that they take him for y^r guide & follow him in his sinfull actings; So ye will find confessing witches acknowledge that they are carried here and there many times upon a call either immediat by Satan, or them that are his Beddells, sometime on y^r own feet and come back again on y^r own feet, other times they are carried and brought back again they know not how.

As for the mark I think there is more weight to be laid upon it then many do. Satan most be in a manner Gods ape to follow & imitate him, he most give marks & impressions, And however Doctors may say such & such things of it, we know not upon what ground, It may be they have been budded & bribed to say such things; yet they themselves may know, and if put to it they will say, that there is still a difference between that insensible mark that the Devil gives, and any oy^r insensible mark that proceeds from any naturall or phisical cause whatsoever.

In the next place we come to the fourt thing which is the ground whence members of the visible church should be carried aside to such a horrible crime as witchcraft And first we say It flowes from that Blindness and perverseness that have fallen upon us by the fall of man. Adam and Eve brought upon themselves a Judicall blindness and thereupon followed a perverseness that people are y^rupon ready to listen much more to Satans temptation then to God. And if God had not had more to do with Adam's posterity It had been easy for Satan to have made Adam and Eve both witches But that God had his Elect to bring out of y^r Loins and had a covenant of grace to transact with Adam and Eve He therefore stopt Satans tentations by that promise 'the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.' 2^{ly} It flowes from people undervaluing slighting & con-

temning the Gospell of Jesus Christ It is a Judiciall plague upon many that have Gospell ordinances and Do not improve them, that they are carried aside to witchcraft, and to follow the devil rather then God 2 Cor 7 chap 4 v God doth not use to Blind folks under the Gospell but these that brings It upon themselves by undervaluing the Gospell & not making use of the offers of grace y^rin, and therefor all of us had need to fear Least we be found casting ourselves in Satans Gate by slighting the offers of grace, for then he may Let us follow the Devil instead of following Christ as he threatens Ezek. 20. 25 that he will give them that as a plague that they shall get such statutes as they cannot Live by. Again 3^{ly} It flowes from the prevalency of some unmortified Lust & corruption among people in the visible church such as covetousness, pride, malice &c. these prevailing, they may make themselves aprey to Satan ; I may here make use of what is said of Baalam, that which did stirr him up to Satans way was, he so Loved the wages of unrighteousness, that was the thing that carried him on to the Devil as ye have it Numb. 22 23. The Love of gain hes been a snare to many to carry them aside to this Evil of Witchcraft as likeways honour & ambition, this was one of the Baits that Balak proposed to Baalam that he would promote him to honour, and no question even these of a higher quality may be carried aside by y^r having respect to honour in this world as well as witches : & others of the poorer sort to get y^r malice and envy satisfied are content to transact with Satan : and thus they that have personally covenanted with Satan are easily drawn to give away these that are under y^r power to Satan also ; and this is a fearfull snare to a young Generation to become of such parents 2 Kings 9, 22 when Jehoram sayes to Jehu Is it peace Jehu ? What peace, says Jehu, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother & her witchcrafts are so many ; and even Jehoram himself was such a person that Elisha the prophet could not deigne himself to give him a word when he with Jehoshaphet came to seek counsell of him concerning the war: What have I to do with thee, says Elisha, Go to the prophets of thy father & the prophets of thy mother As I live saith he before whom I stand If It were not for the presence of Jehoshaphet I would not Look toward thee nor see thee, he being the child of such a vile woman as a filthy whoore & a vile witch, and very probably he followed her steps.

In the next place we come to some inferences that may follow from this, I do not draw them from the very words of the doctrine but from the doctrine complexely delivered from this text and first we may see that these that have been given by y^r parents mediat or immediat to Satan & follow his way & have received his mark & have been traind up by these parents in the way of witchcraft & have practised them, may Justly be Lookd upon as witches formally constitute as being under a reall covenant with Satan, suppose they have never renewed that covenant that was between y^r parents & Satan yet they haveing received his mark, & being given by y^r parents & him, he keeps the grip he gets as long as he can, and so they Joyning with witches & meeting at y^r meetings & consenting to y^r wicked actings are to be Judged witches and the ground I Give for this is, as really as childeren of professing parents receiving the externall signe of gods covenant & coming to the assemblies of his people & Joining with

them in the ordinance & acts of worship, tho they never come under a personal covenant with God themselves yet they are constructed to be in covenant with God as well as the parents, I mean externally in covenant with God Just so may those be Look'd upon as professors of Satan and followers of his way. 2^{ly} these that upon a call from Satan keep the meetings of Satan with his followers and Join with them in acts of murder or tormenting y^r neighbors old or young whether by ordinary means as a cord or napkin to strangle them or by a picture by putting pins in it or roasting it at the fire & flammng it with vinegar & brandie & all to put the person to torment these are not only murtherers by the Law of God but partakers of Devilrie & Witchcraft because they make use of the means that Satan prescribes for the killing of such & such persons. 3^{ly} another inference is that they that confess themselves that they have been frequently at the meetings of Satan with witches and have concurred with him in his wicked way by essaying to torment or murder old or young are to be Lookd upon as confessing witches as well as they had confessed they had made a personal covenant with him themselves & had confessed they had renounced y^r baptism Because it suppons a reall covenant that is that y^r parents or they that have the power of them have given them to Satan, they have his mark if they be well searcht & have practised with Satan and have gone alongst with him in his horrid act of wickedness. A 4th inference is that they that confess they have been carried here and there to such assemblies with witches they know not how, but sometimes they have been at his call to go, are likewayes to be Lookd upon as confessing Witches. This I would a little amplifie thus. The compact real or personal made between Satan & witches hes this in it that they shall be guided and influenced by Satan & be at his call. Now this is the Remark that ye will find from all confessing witches when Satan would have them at meetings there needs no more but a call, there is no refusing this call they most go whether they will or not which is a strange kind of power that Satan hes over these persons they get not Leave to be so deliberate as to choise or refuse to go but go they most.

A 5^t inference is that carnall dealling with Satan is so gross a crime & so opposit to that natural and moral honesty & chastity among all, that those that confess that are to be Lookd upon as confessing witches. A 6^t inference is that where it may be proven that upon a persons touching of the person enchanted, the Enchanted person is presently & constantly brought under their fitts of distemper and the touch of any oy^r does not bring them under these fitts It manifestly imports that that person hes a hand in the enchanting of the enchanted and that that person is under compact with Satan. This hath been remarked by some of the honourable Judges that at such a persons touch the person enchanted was presently cast into the fit of distemper and that not only once or twice but als oft as they toucht, and when oy^r persons toucht, it was not so. Then again where y^r is manifest Divination and telling of Secrets that cannot be told by any oy^r if it can be provine that any person among the pannalls have foretold things that were most secret either they behoovd to be the enchanter or the enchanted person itself But if it be made manifest that they were not enchanted, then it will follow that they most be the enchanter or privie to

the enchanters deeds & 'Socij criminis.' Then Lastly when a person confesses he was at the murder of a child and diverse with him; Before he came from the house he can relate the very words that the wife spoke to the husband, The child is gone or agoing sayes the wife. It cannot be sayes the husband, and a person sayes he heard that, and true it is these were the very words uttered by them, this is a great ground of suspicion concerning these persons, and that persons testimony concerning those that were with him should be Laid much weight upon.

Now the other doctrine is this that they to whom the power of the sword is committed ought not to suffer a witch to live but see that they be put to death this is exprest Levit. 20, 27 It is the express command of God, and his command should be sufficient tho there were no more but there are many grounds beside, first because these persons are the greatest Idolaters imaginable for they Idolize the greatest enemy that christ or God hes to wit the Devil, 2^{ly} they are the greatest Apostates from God, they Renoun[ce the] way of Salvation by Jesus christ by y^r renouncing y^r baptism, for readily Satan does not Cease till he get them to Renounce that that they may come under a formall covenant with him. Again they are the greatest murderers Imaginable. They murder not only themselves but oy^{rs} both old & young as they have access. Again they are the greatest hypocrites under the sun, for they profess notably before the world, they are for God as Baalam, Would he do anything without gods word, No, if Balak wold Give him his house full of Gold and Silver he would not go beyond the word of the Lord Numb. 38 22 23 and 15. he pretended to the greatest religion imaginable, he would do nothing till he calld upon God. But the honourable Judges that have this affair in commission would not Look to what people have professed formerly in the matter of Religion, tho may be beyond oy^{rs} for this Balaam had more profession then many oy^{rs}, and yet the wages of unrighteousness influenced him, and when he could not get his enchantments usd against the people of Israell; yet by bringing the fair midianitish women among them & causing them Join in sacrifice with them to Baalpeer, he got much mischief done to them. This ye may read Numb. 31 16 we may not Lay weight upon what folks profess. It is a Lamentable and sorrowfull matter when these that have been lookt upon as eminently religious come under such a Blunder as this to be givine up for Witchcraft, & have been as active in renouncing y^r baptism as oy^{rs}: this is indeed matter of Lamentation but we most consider there was a Judas among the disciples that betrayed Christ himself to the multitude.

Now I would offer a word to the honourable Judges here appointed for cognoscing this affair that we have been speaking of. And first I would Lay before them that witchcraft is one of these Evil deeds that the spirit of God enjoins death upon & little wonder for witches are the pests of congregations. They are so many Achans that trouble the camp of Israel and when Israel was smitten for one Achan, much more may we fear least we be smitten when so many Such Achans are permitted to live among christians. Again they marr the peace of the professors in the visible church by envy strife & malice for they most be like y^r master Satan who is the father of strife envy and malice, and endeavour still to put

a fire between one christian & another. Again they are a very great Obstruction to the Ministers of the Gospell & marr the furtherance of the Gospell

Another thing I would propose is, the Safety of professors is concerned in it therefor they to whom a matter of Such importance is committed ought to beware that they be not trivial yⁿ, & that they do not burden & wearie in searching it out; Leist the Lord give them a reproofe for being so wearie of that which is his concern

3^{ly} It is manifest by the Scripture that such a thing may be gotten tryed out for oy^r wayes how should this precept take place, Will God command things impossible? Let us not say then it is impossible for us to know the intrigues of Satan, Why hath God said thou shalt not suffer a witch to live? if they cannot be Gotten tryd out, there are means to be used And the Honourable Judges would be Entreated not to wearie of any trouble to y^r person, or of any expenss they may be att.

But further I would propose this that they that are found guilty be not suffered to escape, Leist the Lord meet the Judges at another time with that which he said to Achab when he suffered Benhadad to escape 2 Kings 20, 42 because thou hast Let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction therefor thy Life shall go for his life

Again further I would propose this that confession of the Witches being that which will Clear the Judges most pains would be taken to bring them to a confession, whatever Lawfull means may be used to bring a person guilty of treason against the King to a confession the same is necessary to bring a witch to confession: but those methods I will not prescribe Let the Honourable Judges think upon them as God shall give them direction.

Again further I would have the Honourable Judges consider they get the honour of being called Gods by God himself psal. 82 The Lord standeth in the assembly of the Gods & Judgeth among the mightie and therefor it concerns all such to imitate God in y^r Judgment & Sentence and therefor first whom God Judgeth & passes sentence against they may pass sentence against them too Again God doth not pass sentence Ignorantly he passeth sentence upon knowledge. I know I need not recommend this to the Honourable Judges; for I hope they'll use all means to come to knowledge & light of this affair 3^{ly} God is a holy God he passeth his sentence In holiness, so let them use holiness in passing y^r sentence 4^{ly} God is an Impartial Judge of all, Earthly Judges have sometime been subject to the sin of partiality, I do not suspect any of the Honourable Judges of this, But only I signifie this that it is a sin most abominable in the sight of God to take budd or bribe, who soever have been Guilty of this in former times, let them answer for it when God calls them to accompt. Nixt the honourable Judges would depend upon God, and they & ministers & people would pray to God that he would Let something fall from his hand in the way of providence that may give save clearing in this matter, for the servants of God are Loath to have the Least designe that the Innocent should be scandalized with such a sin, God save us from cruelty in this matter We only desire that God would bring the works of darkness to light, that these that are enemies to God & mankind may be punished.

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Another word I have to say is a word of use to all & it is this O how great an evil most sin be that hath exposd mankind to this to Joyn with Satan & Leave God, and what great wickedness most the undervalueing of the offers of christ & the gospell be. This is a Judiciall stroke from God that Satan Blinds the mind of those that despise the Gospell so far as to get them to covenant with him : Then how great a sin most Envy malice & covetousness be, that persons for gaining the satisfaction of y^r own heart have been content to give themselves & y^r children to the Devil. Lastly all the members of the visible church beware of resting upon your external baptism : It is indeed a mean & barr Laid in the gait of Satan : But beware of resting upon it, for some ye see are brought to renounce y^r baptism, & under that they renounce the whole of Christianity : Let this humble us all & let us bewaill it as a great evil that such a place as the west of Scotland where the gospell of christ hes been purely preacht should have so many in it under suspicion of the crime of Witchcraft. Ye that are free, Bless God that hath kept you from the wicked one, and pray out of zeall to God & his Glory that he would bring thir works of darkness to light that marrs your solemnities & are fearfull spotts in your feasts. I go no further.

AMEN.